

**From:** [Dagseth, Renee](#)  
**To:** [Filippini, Mark](#); [Voytilla, Marykay](#)  
**Cc:** [Chu, Ed](#); [Greaves, Natasha](#)  
**Subject:** communication on the drinking water quality in the Seattle office building.  
**Date:** Wednesday, June 18, 2014 10:28:16 AM  
**Attachments:** [image001.gif](#)

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Dear Mark and Mary Kay,

Thank you for your efforts to address the metals in our drinking water here in the Seattle office as well as your efforts to keep the Seattle folks informed. As a former community involvement coordinator who has worked with communities who have just been informed that their drinking water is contaminated, I know how hard this work is. I am offering some observations on how your efforts are being communicated in the hope that as the problem is resolved, we can all feel positive about the results.

At EPA, we know how to do risk communication but we have not been using that in-house expertise. A lot of successful risk communication has to do with looking at the situation from the audience's point of view and addressing the concerns they have – not just providing the information we experts think they should have. We also need to get information out in ways that reach the greatest number of people. We have the people in this building who could assist with that. This is important because there are pregnant and nursing women in this building, women who will get pregnant, people undergoing chemotherapy and other sensitive populations. There are also some trust and morale issues.

It looks like the Management Matters webpage has been chosen as the primary way to communicate with employees. That is too limited an outlet. Furthermore, the most recent posting on Management Matters does not provide context for the results. We are not all drinking water experts. Here are some topics I recommend addressing:

- What do the numbers mean? (What is the significance of the MCLG?)
- What can people do right now to reduce their risks? (For instance, should we get our drinking water from the kitchen faucets instead, which get heavier use.)
- We are told that more actions are planned but we aren't told what those plans are or the timeline. ("Trust us, we're from the government and we're here to help" really doesn't help increase trust.) If people are concerned about their health, having one of the ATSDR staff available to answer questions is advisable. They are phenomenal risk communicators, right here in our building.
- Has the water in other R10 offices been tested?

I know you also are hosting meetings. I applaud you for stepping up to do meetings in person – not an easy thing. I have not been able to attend one of the meetings so if you are addressing the topics I listed above, great – and if not, please consider adding them to your next presentation. Having someone with community involvement expertise involved at the **earliest stages** of a situation like this can help with scoping out the extent of a problem as well as with developing a strategy for dealing with

it in a way that provides positive outcome for all. The Green Lake Chemical House emergency response is a great recent example of early and continuing risk communication and community outreach. We can do the same for our in-house community.

*Renée Dagseth*

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